

A
LESSON
in LOVE &
MURDER

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A LESSON IN LOVE AND MURDER

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FOR
THOM LEVENE.

*Who not only inspired my lifelong love of story
but taught me it was okay to be myself.*



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If in their economics the Anarchists were hazy, their hatred of the ruling class was strong and vibrant... To the workers themselves it was not the faraway rich but their visible representatives, the landlord, the factory owner, the boss, the policeman, who were the Enemy.

Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower*



CHAPTER ONE

We regret to inform you that due to our company's policy regarding married women in the workforce, we are no longer in need of your services. We are grateful for your loyalty to Spenser's and hope you will accept this coupon for Maidwell's Laundry Soap as a token of our gratitude.

Well, I suppose crime will just have to start to pay!" Jemima DeLuca said, flinging down the letter and the soap coupon with it. The notice was hardly a surprise—everyone knew the rules, and her marriage wasn't exactly a secret. Still, the loss of her job in the Spenser's Department Store mailroom was a turn of events Jem had not fully anticipated.

Ray wouldn't be pleased when he found out. How would they pay their electric bill? It was time to stop solving mysteries gratis, Jem decided with a frown. The murder and mayhem she investigated with her best friend and former flatmate, Merinda Herringford, would need to result in cold, hard cash.

She stomped to the locker room to retrieve her coat and hat, her meager half-week salary note dangling in her shaking hand. A number of her colleagues were gathered there, just at the end of their shift.

"As I was saying," the foreman bellowed at them, "Mr. Spenser has very strict rules about the conduct of his employees. If you want your employment to be terminated"—here he paused dramatically, a hush rippling over the workers—"you may very well go ahead and join the riffraff at Mrs. Goldman's rally."

"You can't stop us from demonstrating views that have nothing to

do with our employment. Not in our free time,” a squeaky voice said from the back.

“Mrs. Goldman speaks against honest work. She would have all of you overthrow Mr. Spenser and the kind people, like myself, who are entrusted to manage you.” The foreman drove a dart of a glare in the direction of a few giggling girls in the corner and went on. “Avoid any path that radical woman crosses. Do not associate with her or the anarchists who follow her. And you can be assured that Mayor Montague’s Morality Squad will be keeping the impressionable young ladies of Toronto safe from Mrs. Goldman’s rallies.”

Keep them safe, all right, thought Jem, slamming her locker shut for the last time. *Safe in St. Jerome’s Reformatory!*

“Ah!” The foreman had finished his address, and the murmurs from the gathered employees crescendoed into conversation. “Mrs. DeLuca. I see you are finally taking your leave.”

“It’s a silly rule,” Jem said testily. “Just because I’m married... just because...”

“Your place is with your husband. You cannot tend to him and your family if you are spending eight hours on your feet in the mailroom.”

Jem wanted to wipe the smirk off his face. Instead, she straightened her shoulders and descended the employee stairwell.

She breathed a long sigh and looked up at the iron door as it clanged shut behind her. Her friend Tippy would keep her informed of the gossip and tales that had often filled their tea breaks. Jem couldn’t help, though, feeling the slammed door clutch at her heart. A part of her life was gone forever. And a new chapter was beginning, and... she really, really needed a job!

Jem walked the half block to Yonge Street, blinking back a prick of tears as the circus of Toronto’s busiest street thrummed into sight and sound. Trolley cars and automobiles and horse-drawn carts warred for space over roads sliced through with tracks and, on each side, gutted with construction. An officer directed traffic with a whistle, white-gloved hands, and a sign he turned to and fro. STOP. GO.

Jem was at the intersection, crossing in the direction of the

streetcar, when the officer waved it to a stop. Jolting forward, she nearly collided with an automobile while the driver screeched several heated words and the horse behind him neighed its frustration.

She mustn't have been paying attention. Thinking instead about home and Ray, who lately had been so busy at the office that she rarely saw him during the week at all. She looked forward to Saturday afternoons, when he would leave his notebook at home and they would explore Cabbagetown or see a nickelodeon or have dinner with Merinda and Jasper Forth, Merinda's friend from the Toronto Police. (Mrs. Malone, Merinda's housekeeper, would always send them home with plenty of leftover food for the week.) But lately, with the threat of the anarchists and Mrs. Goldman's impending arrival in the city, Ray's mind was in the office even when he was away from it.

Jem paid her fare and boarded the streetcar. It must be admitted that her head was no more in the present moment than her husband's, for it took her two stops to realize she was going the wrong way. *Silly emotional girl!* she reprimanded herself as the streetcar rumbled along not in the direction of her home but toward King Street and the townhouse she and Merinda had once shared. She rerouted and trundled down Yonge Street in the opposite direction, her mind as jumbled as the traffic parading outside the trolley window.

"I never thought I would say this," she muttered under her breath, "but I really hope we're in the market for a good murder!"

And that was the last thing she said before teetering over and fainting on the lap of the elderly woman seated in front of her.



Merinda Herringford tripped into mysteries as quickly as she stumbled upon their solutions. This feat was made easier by the fact that she had long since given up on ice pick heels and day suits. Toronto's summer humidity was much more tolerable—and her long limbs much freer—in cotton trousers, brogan shoes, and bobbed hair.

Jasper Forth admired her striking profile as she leaned over to peer

into the test tube. Evidently pleased with what she observed, Merinda threw out her arms like a bird taking flight. "I'm a legend!" she cried.

"Easy there." Jasper raised an amused eyebrow. He almost hoped she would fall so he could catch her and press her to him and smell the tendrils of her hair. "This isn't becoming of a woman of your breeding," he said slyly.*

"A legend, Jasper!" She spun on her heel and faced him, cat eyes sparkling in the bright lights. "This concentrated hemoglobin establishes beyond a doubt that Mr. Darryl was indeed the murderer!"

Jasper wondered briefly if Merinda knew that her smile made his heart complete. That she was the only person in the world. Merinda Herringford and her test tubes and her detection and the voice of her hero, Sherlock Holmes, peeling through her head.

"Elementary," he said lightly, widening her smile. Jasper dabbed at the chemical stains on his fingers. "There we have it. Another win for Herringford and Forth."

"Herringford and Forth." Merinda played it over in her mind, closing her eyes and tasting it for a moment. "Yes. Herringford and Forth. I like that!" She smiled broadly, tipping up her chin. "Come, Jasper! Is there anything more we can possibly contribute to the fascinating world of forensic observation today?"

"Probably not." He lit like a moonbeam when Merinda grabbed his arm and tugged him toward the broad oak door of the laboratory.

Jasper remembered the first time he saw her, the first time he heard her laugh. The first time he noticed the light outlining her angular profile. The first time he decided that his life would be nothing without her somehow a part of it, peppering it with her eccentricities, her buoyant personality, her trousers and bowler hats, her short hems. He wondered if this was the moment to say everything, to untie all the thoughts packed in a tight parcel in his mind.

He swallowed. This was it.

* He was bold to say this. Usually when someone mentioned breeding, Merinda would reply, "Breeding? What am I now, a cow to pasture?"

But the words didn't come.* Instead, he stuttered, "You should have been a doctor. You would have made an incredible doctor. You would have been top of your class, Merinda, you know that."

She brushed at her trousers and tugged the rim of her hat over her bobbed blonde curls. "And miss the adventure?"

"You might want to actually make some money someday."

"You sound like Jemima!" She played with a loose thread at the bottom of her vest, biting her lip. "But everything's changing, isn't it?"

"You mean Jem."

"I didn't say that."

"You didn't have to say it. Merinda..." Jasper caught her hand, white and long-fingered. "Merinda, I won't change or go away."

"Of course you won't, Jasper. You're like my favorite sweater. It comes out every year just as it gets cold and..."

"Merinda, I'm serious."

Merinda blinked a few times and gingerly disengaged herself. "Come on."

Jasper wished he could recapture the moment, but as they stepped outside, he knew time was shifting. He tried to shrug off the premonition as he tucked his hands deep in his pockets, but he couldn't shake the feeling that his fixed point, his Merinda, was going to be moving, changing—and at such a galloping pace that he'd never catch up.

Back at the station house, his thoughts still spiraled Merinda-ward. What might it be like if he left Tipton and the police behind and joined the ranks of her private investigation firm?

"Forth!" Tipton's voice echoed through the corridor. The chief crooked his finger in Jasper's direction.

Jasper took the hall in two strides and closed Tipton's office door as requested.

"Take a seat."

Jasper did.

* This was not the first time—nor would it be the last—Jasper Forth was on the precipice of a moment of wooing, only to be struck dumb by her cat eyes boring into him.

“Drink?”

“Not while on duty, sir.” Jasper tugged at his collar, trying to hide his surprise when the chief poured himself a finger of whiskey.

“Good man.” Tipton inclined his glass. “There’s been another one of those trolley mishaps.”

Jasper’s face whitened, and he instinctively leaped from his chair, almost taking it with him.

“Not so fast, not so fast,” said the chief. “We have men on the scene already. You’ll get there and see that someone’s meddled with the wiring. It doesn’t take a genius to know these ‘accidents’ are premeditated.”

“I guessed as much. I was hoping they would strike again so I could find proof.” Jasper coughed to hide his embarrassment. “What I meant to say is that I would like to catch the culprits. Not for more innocent lives to be lost.”

Tipton smiled. “I know. But no one outside this office must suspect foul play. That muckraker DeLuca from the *Hogtown Herald* is sniffing about with that cameraman of his. Those two always seem to be two steps ahead of us. I know you are friendly with him. I am asking you to keep our speculations to yourself.”

“But, sir, these are not accidents, and the public has a right to know. To be aware of the danger to their safety. Letting people know will also save the Toronto Rail Commission from embarrassment. They don’t deserve to have the guilt of these blasts on their consciences.”

“I am ordering you to say nothing to the press. This is coming directly from Mayor Montague,” said the chief. “He wants to show that the city will not be prey to these anarchists and their vicious antics. Especially with the arrival of Emma Goldman so imminent. He wants us to stand by and help the public not to panic.”

Jasper sighed. Tipton had been in Montague’s pocket for years. It was one of the reasons Jasper didn’t trust the chief, though he had little choice but to follow his orders. But he had never before been asked to lie. “This is not the first time Montague has steered us in the direction of hiding information, sir. Those Irish girls were swept under the

carpet. Two more girls almost died, and a murderer nearly went free! We both know his methods aren't..."

Tipton slammed his glass down on his desk. "Forth, I know you're one of the good ones. I know you're honest and you believe in the badge you wear. But what good does it do to take the moral high ground when it means negative ramifications in the future? Budget cuts? Divisional downsizing?*" That just means more crime in the future. No, we need to toe Montague's line. Keep his silly morality squad and whatnot. We can play the man's game, can we not?"

Tipton picked up his glass again and took a long sip. "Montague especially hates that DeLuca fellow and his stupid little paper. The man's a menace, no matter how pretty his wife is. I know she's a friend of yours, but you don't have to be guilted into saying anything when he pesters you like a mosquito."

"Sir, I don't feel comfortable lying. If Ray DeLuca outright asks me for information..."

"Don't get near enough to him and you won't be put on the spot. Keep your Sunday school manners intact, eh?" Tipton nodded, agreeing with his own point. Then he waved his empty glass in Jasper's direction. "You get down to that scene. You're the man I trust to calm that panic and keep things in order. Take Jones with you."

Jasper nodded and turned to leave. But his hand froze on the doorknob. "Sir, may I speak freely?"

Tipton raised an eyebrow. "Go ahead."

"Nothing good will come of our playing Montague's game. This city is his stage, and we are all puppets. It's money and power he wants, and he'll get it at the expense of everyone—businessmen, officials like yourself, even the women and immigrants he preys upon. Something bigger is coming. These anarchists who have been holding rallies in the city—they see through his game. There will be more

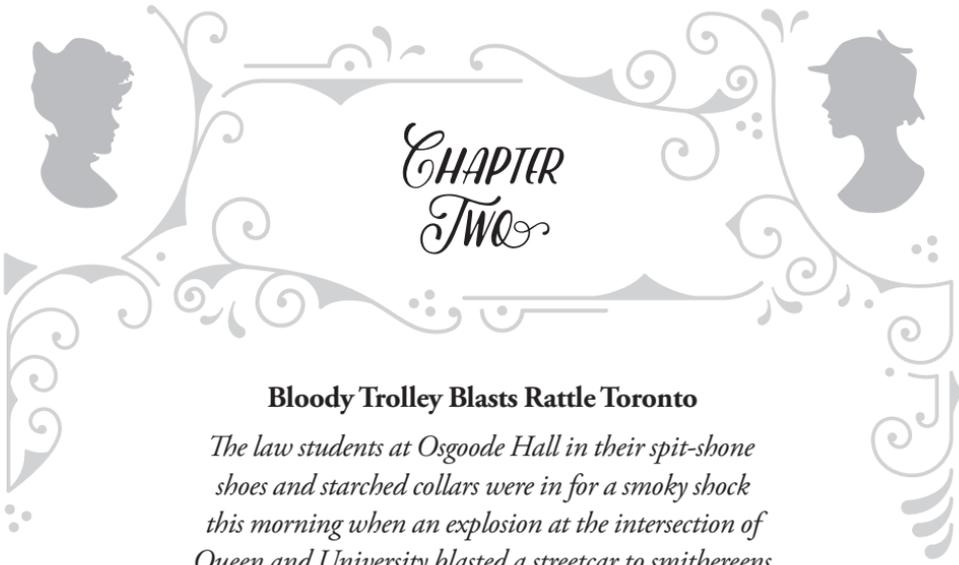
* Jasper couldn't help but wonder why the chief insisted on talking about administrative matters when there was a trolley car sputtering into flame nearby, full of injured passengers. But there were many things he didn't understand about his supervisor, so he kept this opinion to himself.

violence. More explosions. The people are hungry, and they think Emma Goldman and her crowd can give them the voice they want. And they'll take any means to get it." Jasper shook his head. "You've been in this job a long time. Surely you see that Montague is not the ally you want him to be."

"Forth, there is so much about the workings of this city that you don't understand. How old are you, anyway?"

"Twenty-seven, sir."

"You're young. I've been at this longer than you've been alive. Keep to your task. You're a good officer and a good man. You leave the big fish to me."



CHAPTER TWO

Bloody Trolley Blasts Rattle Toronto

The law students at Osgoode Hall in their spit-shone shoes and starched collars were in for a smoky shock this morning when an explosion at the intersection of Queen and University blasted a streetcar to smithereens. Chaos ensued with the arrival of the medics as well as the fire brigade, who attempted to dispel any last threat from the fiery, singed streetcar. The seriously wounded were immediately attended by medics and taken to nearby St. Michael's. The deceased, shrouded with black cloth, were immediately removed to the morgue.

The Hogtown Herald

Another one.” That was all Ray DeLuca could say to his jack-of-all-trades assistant, Skip McCoy, as they surveyed the wreckage of the trolley. Skip had already been on the scene when Ray arrived panting. The second explosion in a week. Wires stretched like jagged limbs from the car’s carcass, bursts of flame flickered, and debris soiled the landscape.

They walked among the chaos, the medics, and the officials, hearing among ripples of gasps charges against faulty wiring. Six seriously injured passengers were quickly transferred to St. Michael’s Hospital at Victoria Street. Ten bodies lay in a row, already covered in cloth. Ray could hardly tear his eyes away.

Skip and Ray wove their way through the panicked crowd, smoke

stinging their eyes, medics maneuvering stretchers while the police bellowed or pressed whistles to their lips. Ray, who prided himself on being as quick as a fox when it came to sidling up to a scene and making it to the midst of the action, was surprised that Skip had beaten him to the scene of some of the events of the highest magnitude in the past few weeks.

Skip was the first to catch an anarchist group circling around the embassy in a raucous rally the day before Emma Goldman arrived. Skip was the first on the scene at Queen's Park when the trolley workers first picketed for an upcoming strike. Skip was beating Ray at his own game. Usually Skip trailed Ray wherever he went and took excellent direction. But now?

Ray shoved his way through the line of fire brigade officers, nearly stumbling over an injured young man. On the far side of the wreckage, a tall, broad-shouldered man assessed the damage.

"Jasper!" Ray called, jogging the last few steps between them, being careful to avoid the wiring, steel rods, and bricks.

Jasper Forth ran his hand over his face. He looked tired. His usually pleasant and open countenance was shaded with fatigue and concern. He put a hand on Ray's shoulder, slightly shoving him back. "I'd be careful. A few fires are still burning." He looked around.

Ray's brow furrowed. "I feel like we're reliving this accident. Osgoode Hall was what—three days ago?"

"The two most tragic accidents in our rail history," Jasper said blandly.

"Faulty wires?" It was more a question than a statement in Ray's voice.

"Indeed," Jasper said uncertainly. He led Ray from the worst of the damage and toward bustling Bathurst Street. Even though the intersection was barricaded, people still bustled around, many leaning through the police lines to take a closer peek.

It was a popular streetcar route, taken by hundreds of Torontonians daily. Ray knew as he looked at the shocked faces that the

strangers around him were wondering how it had happened—and how it might happen again.

“Jasper, you look like a hare at the end of a rifle point. Stop peering around so skittishly!”

Jasper blinked tears from his eyes, and not for the first time. Just before Skip moved to the other side of the collision, he made a remark under his breath. Ray replied that it was probably just the film of smoke stinging the constable’s eyes. Despite his recent promotion to detective, Jasper never seemed to be able to keep his entire emotional range from his broad, bright face. Now, Ray saw, he was aching for the senseless loss of innocent life.

A long silence stretched between them. Ray shoved his hands deep into his pockets. “It’s news at least.” Ray thought aloud before he registered how callous the statement sounded. “Last week all I had was the Mackay-Bennet boat finding more of those *Titanic* corpses and moving them to Halifax for burial.” Jasper said nothing, staring ahead. Ray continued, saying lightly, “And some delegate preferring turbot to trout at a dignitaries’ dinner at the King Edward.”

Ray could almost taste the smell of smoke on his singed clothes as they moved even farther to the side of the street. He realized he hadn’t even gone home for a change of shirt the night before. No wonder the damp fabric stuck to him. The evening before, he was still up to his ears in facts and theories from the Osgoode Hall accident, putting together pieces of a puzzle. Death statements, witness accounts, historical statistics of the railcar’s history.

Come to think of it, he had failed (again) to telephone Jem and tell her he’d be late. That is, he’d failed to send a message with Kat or Mouse, the urchins who sometimes worked with Jem and Merinda. The guilt gnawed at him—guilt for more than his silence. He hadn’t been able to pay the electrical bill, and their telephone had been cut off the week before.

He straightened his face so Jasper wouldn’t be plagued with one more thing to worry about and turned his attention back to the

matter at hand. Shaking his head, he observed, "So highly unlikely it was an accident."

"Our station could have used you years ago. You have a better pulse on criminal activity in Toronto than most."

Ray grimaced. "I can't tell whether that's a compliment or not."

"It's a compliment. From me. Not from Tipton. Reason I'm so on edge is because he forbade me to talk to you."

"And why is that?" Ray said, knowing the answer even as he asked it.

"Tipton is under Montague's thumb, and Montague hates you."

"No love lost there."

"I'm not supposed to tell you I suspect these accidents to be intentional."

"And yet here we are." Ray smiled.

"I found something last week at Osgoode." Jasper reached into his pocket "And it caught my eye because it was so unusual. It could be anything, any scrap, really. But I thought it was of interest. Then, earlier, after spending too much time plying tweezers through that blasted rubble, my eye caught on something."

He extracted two squares of plastic and held them out to Ray. Ray unwrapped the package and found a small wire that he held up with inky fingers. He squinted. "You have a very good eye to see these with all of *that* going on." He inclined his head in the direction of the explosion. The wire was slight and black, charred really, but shaped in the most interesting knot. Ray set the piece down and attempted to mime the slight fingers that might have tied such a small, thin wire so intricately.

"I don't know what it means yet." Jasper ran his fingers through brown hair still matted in the shape of the hat that he now dangled tiredly at his side. He didn't stand on ceremony when it was just the two of them watching Skip's bulb flashing, the medics loading vans to the hospital, and the passersby and witnesses dispersing to be questioned or sent home. "But something about it seemed odd."

"How did you ever see that amidst all those wires and things?"

“Something Merinda said once, probably. From that Wheaton fellow.* ‘Stop looking for what you expect to find.’ It inspired me to widen my gaze.”

Ray gingerly rewrapped the small knotted wire and handed it back to Ray.

“No. Possessing this could land me back on traffic duty, but I’d like you to keep it. You see more of the city than I do. If it’s something, maybe you’ll notice it too. But don’t come by the station. Tipton would be furious if I were even seen talking to you. We’ll find somewhere to talk.”

Ray folded it into his breast pocket, patting its space emphatically.

Jasper smiled gravely. “I feel like a heel. Betraying Tipton’s trust. Going behind his back. Even dragging you into this. I’ll have no excuse if he catches us.”

“Jasper, we’re allies. I need you on my side. I don’t have many friends, but I trust you. You can trust me too.”

“I know that.”

“And I am your friend, whether or not Merinda Herringford is speaking to you at any given moment,” Ray added lightly.

“I wish I had her pluck. Would make everything easier.”

“There are many ways to show strength, Jasper.”

A ruckus across the street erupted, with Tipton at the center and camera bulbs flashing. Ray recognized a few reporters from the *Globe*, each trying to inch closer over the singed steel. He had no interest in a statement from the chief. Ray and Jasper exchanged a look.

“Interesting,” Jasper said slowly. “I spoke to him earlier, and he made no suggestion that he would grace us with his presence.”

Ray smirked at Jasper’s tone.

Leaving Jasper and spotting Skip meandering closer to Tipton and his statement, Ray turned in the direction of the *Hog*. It was a long walk but preferable to finding a cab amid the insanity and

* M.C. Wheaton, author of *Guide to the Criminal and Commonplace*, Merinda’s detection manual of choice.

commotion. All the trolleys had stopped immediately, and a dozen empty streetcars sat abandoned and unmoving on their tracks.

Finally at his desk, hair damp with perspiration, shirt sleeves rolled up to his elbows, he thought about betraying Jasper's trust. It would make for an easy headline and spare several sheets of paper from a crumpled toss at the overflowing wastebasket. *Leading Detective Constable Suspects Foul Play.*

He muttered in his first language, kicked a few overturned crates, and almost swept his typewriter from his desk to the floor. Then, immediately remorseful for the thought, he stroked the Underwood gently. Some nights it was his dearest friend.

He stared at the telephone. Made to pick it up. Then remembered the service had been turned off at home. Poor Jem. What a husband he'd turned out to be.

Jem deserved a stable home, matching dishes, and a happily-ever-after. But lately he'd been returning home to find her asleep fully clothed on the sofa in the front room, clearly waiting for him with a book open on her chest. If she had nicely set the table with flowers from their overrun garden and her one good lace tablecloth, it made him feel like a cad for days. What did he have to say for himself?

Of course he loved her. Loved the way she set the pace for ironing out their little spats and misunderstandings, results of their whirlwind courtship and an uprooting of their two worlds they were trying to graft together. Sometimes the barrier between them seemed greater than one of language, but then she'd look up at him as if he was the force that pulled in her tide and spun her earth. He didn't deserve any of it, really.

He flipped open his pocket watch. He hadn't noticed so much of the evening had ticked away with few words to show for his tired brain. He yawned and ran an open hand over his face, and then he focused his eyes on the picture inside. His sister, Viola, and his little nephew, Luca. His chest constricted as it did whenever he thought about her. When he worried about her. Was she cold? Did she have

somewhere to stay? Was her good-for-nothing husband, Tony, providing for her or just hitting her again? Did Luca have enough to eat?

He grabbed his hat from the rack. When he started drifting into panic about Viola, he knew he would get no more work finished for the evening and it was time to head home.